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Identity Needs versus Social Opportunities: The Use of Group-Level and Individual-Level Identity Management Strategies

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This study investigates how relative group size and group status affect the use of direct and indirect identity management strategies, which may serve either individual or collective goals. On the basis of social identity theory, we hypothesized that strategy preference would be determined jointly by (1) the relative status of the in-group, (2) the nature of the comparison dimension, and (3) the level of in-group identification. In a laboratory situation, students were assigned randomly to groups of over- and underestimators. The in-group constituted either a majority or a minority group. Group status subsequently was manipulated by false feedback on a group creativity task. The main results showed that high status group members display in-group favoritism on status related dimensions, while low status group members consider the in-group superior on an alternative dimension. Furthermore, group members tend to accentuate the heterogeneity of the in-group on those dimensions on which they consider their group inferior. Finally, claims of in-group superiority on alternative dimensions in response to inferior status (a group-level strategy), were made only by high identifiers, while accentuation of in-group heterogeneity (an individual-level strategy) was observed only among low identifiers.

Social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979; see also Hogg, Terry, and White 1995) has inspired a large body of research into intergroup relations. A common finding in this research is that people tend to systematically treat members of their own group more favorably than members of other groups when giving evaluative ratings or making allocating outcomes. Various researchers have attempted to uncover why this might be the case, and to specify the circumstances under which group members would be most likely to display such biases in favor of the in-group. On the assumption that people should be especially motivated to favor the in-group when their social identity is threatened (e.g., because their group com-

pares negatively with relevant other groups), researchers in this area have focused on whether such biases would be more pronounced when one's group holds a low- (rather than a high-) status position, or when it has minority (rather than majority) size. Unfortunately this research has not yielded unequivocal results. In the present contribution we argue that social identity theory *does not propose* a direct relation between relative group status or relative group size and in-group favoritism. Instead these different group features may interact to determine the occurrence of such biases. Furthermore, in-group favoritism is only *one* possible strategy for coping with identity threat. In addition to such straightforward claims of in-group superiority, group members may use more subtle strategies to depict their group positively, especially when their group is generally held in low regard. Alternatively, insofar as people do not identify strongly with their group, they may opt for a more individual-level identity management strategy by emphasizing intra-group differences. In the present study we address the concerns outlined above by orthogonally manipulating group size and group status, investigating the effects of these manipulations on the use of different identity management strategy, and

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relating strategic preferences to strength of in-group identification.

Researchers have pointed out that relative group status seems to have inconsistent effects on biases favoring the in-group (cf. Hinkle and Brown 1990). Some investigations have revealed stronger in-group favoritism among members of lower-status groups; others report more in-group-favoring biases in groups with higher status (also see Mullen, Brown, and Smith 1992). In a similar vein, the size of the majority group (see Brewer 1991) as well as the minority group (Sachdev and Bourhis 1984) has been associated with increased in-group favoritism, but some studies found no relation between relative group size and in-group favoritism (Gerard and Hoyt 1974). Although these investigations were inspired by social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979), they neglect the fact that this theory does not predict a direct relationship between relative status and group size, on the one hand, and in-group favoritism, on the other. In fact, as we argue in greater detail below, much of the research has not done justice to social identity theory, which predicts that group members may use *different strategies* to cope with threat to identity, depending on the circumstances (see Hogg and Abrams 1988).

Group size and in-group favoritism

In previous attempts to understand the role of relative group size as a determinant of in-group favoritism, it was often argued that membership in a minority group is unattractive (see Maass and Clark 1984 for a similar argument regarding minority influence) because it is inferior on the salient dimension of intergroup comparison, namely group size (see Gerard and Hoyt 1974). Therefore members of minority groups would be strongly compelled to depict their group in a favorable light. As we have reported above, however, different empirical studies of this issue have yielded inconsistent results. Indeed, although Mullen et al. (1992) in their meta-analysis found that group members tend to display more in-group-favoring biases when their group is smaller, the overall effect was rather weak.

In the research on minority-group membership to date, numerical group size also may carry implicit status information (see Banaji and Prentice 1994). Indeed, in social psycho-

logical research as in everyday use, in social psychological research the term *minority group* apparently has acquired a connotation of subordinate status (see Blanz, Mummeny, and Otten 1995, who conceive of minority size as an "aggravating condition"). Nevertheless, as some researchers have pointed out (Ellemers, Doosje, Van Knippenberg, and Wilke 1992; Kruglanski and Mackie 1990; Sachdev and Bourhis 1991; Simon and Hamilton 1994), status and numerical size are separate group characteristics, which are not necessarily correlated.

Only a few experimental studies so far have investigated independent effects of group size and group status (Blanz et al., 1995; Ellemers et al. 1992; Sachdev and Bourhis 1991; Simon and Hamilton 1994). With respect to outcome allocations, it seems that in conditions where both status and group size are made explicit, in-group favoritism is determined primarily by relative group status rather than by size (see Blanz et al. 1995; Ellemers et al. 1992; Sachdev and Bourhis 1991). Thus the inconsistent effects of group size that previous researchers observed may have to be ascribed to implicit differences in perceived group status. Consequently, it is important to disentangle group status and group size as separate determinants of people's responses to group membership; this is the first goal of the present study. If relative group status and relative group size are manipulated orthogonally, differential displays of in-group favoritism will be elicited mainly by relative in-group status rather than by in-group size (Hypothesis 1).

Group Status and Direct versus Indirect Claims of In-Group Superiority

To understand the circumstances in which people tend to favor the in-group, we now look more closely at the role of differential group status. As we mentioned briefly above, social identity theory at first sight would seem to predict more in-group favoritism among members of lower-status groups, but the proposed relations are actually more complex; indeed previous investigations yielded inconsistent results. Therefore it seems crucial to determine *under which circumstances* low-status group members are likely to challenge the existing status relations (i.e., show in-group favoritism), and when they are more

inclined to reflect the status quo in their group ratings (i.e., favor the out-group).

Mullen et al. (1992) suggest that members of high-status groups may be more likely to show in-group favoritism when relative status is derived from a specific criterion (e.g., differential task performance), while low-status group members may show in-group favoritism on more global or more diffuse criteria. Rather than clear intergroup differences in group task performance, we argue that more globally defined differences in intergroup status give group members more leeway to bias their individual group perceptions without violating consensual definitions of social reality (see Ellemers et al. forthcoming). Thus, when group status has been induced experimentally with bogus feedback about relative group performances, members of a low-status group may not feel free to make straightforward claims of in-group superiority. Instead they are expected to derive a positive social identity in more subtle or more indirect ways. (For a similar argument with respect to personal self-esteem, see Brown, Collins, and Schmidt 1988).

Thus, when studying people's responses to low group status, one must keep in mind that they may feel constrained from showing straightforward in-group favoritism on the focal criterion of intergroup comparison. In the literature, the term *social creativity* (see Lemaine 1974) has been proposed to account for various more subtle attempts to bolster the identity of a lower-status group. In line with Lemaine's suggestion (see also Tajfel and Turner, 1979) that people may try to introduce alternative criteria by which the in-group seems superior, the use of such indirect strategies has been studied mostly with natural groups, in which the importance of different comparative dimensions could be inferred only after the fact (see Mummendey and Schreiber 1983, 1984; Mummendey and Simon 1989; Spears and Manstead 1989; Van Knippenberg 1978; Van Knippenberg and Van Oers 1984; Van Knippenberg and Wilke 1979). In their meta-analysis reviewing such studies, Mullen et al. (1992) conclude that members of high-status groups are likely to consider the in-group superior on relevant dimensions, whereas members of low-status groups display in-group favoritism on less relevant dimensions. This would be consistent with our previous argument that low-status

group members may perceive a realistic opportunity to claim in-group superiority only on dimensions which are not directly related to the groups' status positions.

Nevertheless, as Mullen et al. (1992) also point out, this conclusion was reached through a meta-analytic integration of findings from different studies. Therefore we must directly compare mutual ratings of high- and low-status groups on dimensions with differential relevance to status in a single experiment, to further specify the relation between in-group bias and the status relevance of comparative dimensions. Some recent studies addressing this issue (Blanz et al. 1995; Brewer, Manzi, and Shaw 1993), seem to support for the global hypothesis that lower-status group members should display differential patterns of in-group and out-group favoritism on dimensions related and unrelated to status (see Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears 1995). Nevertheless, the results of these investigations are not quite consistent with each other and thus remain somewhat inconclusive. The second goal of the present study therefore is to more systematically examine whether members of low-status groups acknowledge out-group superiority on the status-defining dimension (Hypothesis 2a), while they favor the in-group on an alternative dimension (Hypothesis 2b).

Group-Level versus Individual-Level Strategies

So far our discussion has concerned direct and indirect ways to derive a positive group identity. To date, however, research into this issue has focused mainly on the use of different responses intended to address the way one's *group* is viewed. Yet even in early formulations of social identity theory (Tajfel 1974, 1975, 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979) Tajfel and Turner mentioned social mobility as an individual-level response in addition to group-level strategies such as social competition and social creativity.¹ Although it has

¹ Throughout the text we refer to individual- versus group-level strategic responses in keeping with the original theoretical statements (see Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979) about the use of various "identity management strategies." We use the term *strategy* or *strategic response* to denote a situation in which people's group perceptions are strategically adapted to place either themselves (in the case of an "individual strategy") or their group (in the case of a "group-level strategy") in a

been acknowledged in principle that different strategies may be used in principle (see Van Knippenberg 1989), empirical investigations of low-status group members' perceptions and behavior of low status group members have focused almost exclusively on the use of group-level strategies such as straightforward in-group favoritism (as in social competition) or social creativity (as summarized above).

Prospects for individual mobility, however, may play an important role in people's responses to low group status. Members of lower-status groups generally seem to be less satisfied with their group membership, and to be less inclined to identify as group members when individual mobility to a higher-status group appears feasible (see Ellemers et al. 1988; Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, and Wilke 1990; Ellemers, Wilke, and Van Knippenberg 1993). Tajfel (1974, 1975, 1978) theoretically conceives of individual social mobility as an actual change of group membership, but the general inclination to set oneself apart from one's group may also become apparent on a psychological level. Simon, Pantaleo, and Mummendey (1995) found that intragroup similarity is accentuated after positive intergroup comparisons are made. Conversely, Doosje, Spears, and Koomen (1995) observed that when the in-group compares *unfavorably* with a relevant out-group, group members are likely to accentuate the *variability* among in-group members. They argue that this enables individual group members to maintain a positive self-image at the expense of the rest of the group by suggesting that although the group as a whole compares unfavorably, this is not necessarily the case for all group members.

Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears (1995) extend this argument by pointing out that

positive light. Even though individual group members' perceptions are assessed in both cases, biased perceptions may serve different goals. Group-level strategic perceptions involve the claim or conviction that the in-group as a whole is superior in some way; we use the term *individual-level strategies* to denote perceptions that give individual group members the opportunity to dissociate the self from a negatively evaluated in-group. In the present study we do not measure behavioural attempts to improve one's social standing individually or as a group; nonetheless people's sense of in-group identification, and the resulting tendency to see one's group as a valuable unit (group-level) or to dismiss the importance of one's group membership (individual-level), supposedly constitute the psychological equivalent and are important precursors of the different forms of action that may occur.

in-group identification plays a crucial role. With natural as well as artificially created groups, they demonstrated that only the people who identify strongly with their group are prepared to stick together when they are informed of its inferior status. In contrast, low identifiers try to defuse the negative implications of membership in a lower-status group by emphasizing the heterogeneity among individual group members. In a further series of studies, Spears, Doosje, and Ellemers (forthcoming) showed that when their group was threatened, low-identifying group members were more likely to perceive themselves as different from the rest of the group, while high identifiers maintained that they were prototypical in-group members. In other words, these studies suggest that perceptions of intragroup variability may be used as a strategic response to information on group status. Furthermore, the finding that only low identifiers claimed intragroup variability in response to low-group status (while high identifiers accentuated the homogeneity of their low-status in-group) confirms that this response is an individual-level attempt to address a threatened identity.

In sum, there are theoretical as well as empirical reasons to assess the use of individual-level strategies to cope with a threatened identity. Therefore we include perceived intragroup heterogeneity as an indication of an individual-level response to unfavorable intergroup comparisons, in addition to group-level (central-tendency) measures of strategic perceptions. Accordingly we predict that high identifiers tend to use group-level strategies, and hence will claim in-group superiority, while low-identifying group members are more likely to accentuate intragroup heterogeneity as an individual-level strategy (Hypothesis 3).

In-Group Identification as a Mediator of Differential Strategic Responses

To predict whether individual group members will be inclined to engage in group-level or individual-level identity management strategies, one must take into account their level of in-group identification. Research has revealed that low group status generally results in lower mean levels of identification than high group status (see Ellemers 1993), an indication that at least some group members resist identification as group mem-

bers when confronted with their group's inferior status. In view of our previous observation that highly identified group members prefer group-level strategies, while less strongly identified group members tend to show an individual-level response to low group status (see Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears 1995; Spears, et al. forthcoming), it would seem that in-group favoritism can be predicted in response to low group status only insofar as group members maintain some sense of group identification (see Turner, Hogg, Turner, and Smith, 1984).

When we investigate factors other than group status that may affect people's inclination to identify as group members, we find that relative group size may have an independent effect on the level of in-group identification. Indeed, in research with artificial (Blanz, et al. 1995; Brewer and Weber 1994; Simon and Brown 1987; Simon and Hamilton 1994, exp. 1) as well as real-life groups (Abrams 1994), stronger in-group identification was consistently observed in minority groups than in majorities. Brewer (1991), in her "optimal distinctiveness" theory, argues that this may be the case because minority-group membership enables people to reconcile the desire to belong to a social group with their striving for personal uniqueness. Thus we predict independent effects of group status and group size on in-group identification. We expect lower overall in-group identification with low group status (Hypothesis 4a), but given the in-group's relative status position we expect stronger in-group identification among minority-group members than in majority groups (Hypothesis 4b).

Insofar as membership in a minority group results in stronger identification as a group member, it may strengthen the inclination to show a group-level response (rather than an individual-level response) to low group status. In other words, we argue that minority size, rather than constituting an "aggravating condition" (see Blanz et al. 1995), fosters displays of in-group favoritism because it motivates people to engage in a specific kind of response to their group's relative status.

The Present Study

Previous investigations could not unequivocally relate displays of in-group favoritism to either relative group status or relative group size, possibly because of various limitations

in the relevant research. First, to investigate Hypothesis 1, in the present study we manipulate relative group status as well as relative group size as independent variables rather than allowing implicit status connotations to influence effects of group size. Second, instead of relying on a single measure of in-group favoritism, we assess intergroup perceptions on status-related as well as alternative comparative dimensions, in order to tap the use of both indirect and direct claims of in-group superiority (see Hypothesis 2). Furthermore, for each comparative dimension we include perceptions of intragroup variability to investigate individual-level strategic responses (Hypothesis 3). Finally, we assess strength of in-group identification as a function of different group characteristics (Hypothesis 4), in order to see whether this mediates displays of either individual- or group-level strategic responses.

METHOD

Participants and Design

Seventy-eight students (49 women and 29 men) at the Free University in Amsterdam volunteered to participate in this study. Their mean age was 22 years. Participants were assigned randomly to one of the experimental conditions, although the proportion of male and female participants was held constant in each cell. After completing this experiment, participants also took part in a second (unrelated) study. In total, participation in both experiments took about 1 1/2 hours; participants were remunerated with book tokens for 17.5 Dutch guilders (equal to approximately \$10 US).

Allegedly on the basis of their performance on an individual estimations task, participants were allocated randomly to a majority or a minority group. Subsequently they performed a group creativity test and received false feedback about the performance of the groups on this test. Each participant's "own" group performed relatively well (high status) or relatively badly (low status) on the creativity test. This manipulation resulted in a 2 (relative group size: majority, minority) by 2 (relative group status: high, low) between-subjects design.

Procedure

Overview. The experiment was introduced as a study on collaboration in groups; eight

participants were present at each experimental session. Upon arrival, each participant was individually seated in a room with a personal computer and was told that all computers were linked to each other. Allegedly on the basis of an estimations task, participants first were divided into two groups of different sizes (group size manipulation). Then they allegedly performed an interactive group creativity task through the computer network, after which the bogus feedback on group performance was administered (group status manipulation). The dependent variables were measured; upon completion, the participants were carefully debriefed about the design and purposes of the experiment, and were asked not to discuss the study with others.

Group assignment. After they had been informed that the goal of the experiment was to study group collaboration, participants first performed an individual estimations task, allegedly to enable the experimenter to divide them into groups. This task comprised 10 items in which participants had to estimate the number of black cubes in a picture. Upon completing this task, participants were led to believe that their performance on this task made it possible to distinguish overestimators from underestimators (see Brewer et al. 1993).

At this point, additional information about the incidence of over- and underestimators was provided, to anchor and enhance the subsequent manipulation of relative group size (see Ellemers, et al. 1992). Participants were told that overestimators either constituted 70 percent (majority condition) or 30 percent (minority condition) of the student population. Then they received information about their own estimation style, which was always said to be "overestimator". (Pretesting had revealed no difference in group evaluation based on one of these group labels; see Doosje, Spears, and Koomen 1995). Subsequently, the participants received information about the relative sizes of the two groups in this experimental session, which always reflected the alleged population distribution. In the majority condition they were led to believe that their group consisted of five participants; in the minority condition only three participants were said to belong to their group. The other group (the underestimators) comprised three (Majority condition) or five (Minority condition) persons respectively. After they had received this information,

participants were asked to check whether they belonged to the majority or the minority of students, in terms of their estimation style. They were asked to copy the information about in-group and out-group size on a feedback sheet which was provided. It was emphasized that two groups were now formed and that participants would work together with their group for the remainder of the study.

Group creativity test. We manipulated group status with a task that allegedly measured group creativity. We explained that this test had proved to be a reliable predictor of actual group creativity in work situations. Further, we emphasized that creativity is an important feature of a group and is a major contributor to group success. At this point, participants were told that the aim of the current study was to investigate how the composition of the group affects group creativity.

Next the participants completed the group creativity test, which consisted of 12 statements. Each statement described a problematic work situation; participants had to indicate how they might resolve the problem. (example: If you arrive late at work you might say: '. . . .'). According to the explanation provided, the answers given by all group members would be taken into account in calculating a group creativity score. These scores allegedly would be corrected for the difference in group size. Furthermore, we emphasized that this was a group task; individual scores would neither be calculated nor provided.

After completing the test, participants received feedback about the alleged performance of the two groups present. First they were shown their own group's score; in all conditions this was 64 points. Then they were shown the other group's score: in the high-status condition this was 38 points, in the low-status condition, 90 points. The alleged mean norm score for students also was shown in order to enhance the group status manipulation (see Ellemers et al. 1992). In the high-status condition this was said to be 51 points; in the low-status condition 77 points. At this point we stated whether the group had scored below or above the students' average score and whether the group was highly creative (high status) or only moderately creative (low status). This information also had to be written on the sheet provided.

Dependent Measures

Manipulation checks. Participants were asked to indicate the relative sizes and status positions of the two groups. When they made mistakes the correct information was shown to them again.

Optimal distinctiveness. We measured optimal distinctiveness with four questions that could be answered on 7-point Likert scales (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree). These questions referred to the desire to be a unique person and to distinguish oneself from others ("In this group I am able to be myself"; "Membership in this group gives me the opportunity to distinguish myself from other participants"; "In this group I feel that I am done full justice"; "I am satisfied with the size of this group"). A principal-components analysis confirmed that these questions could be subsumed under a single factor, which had an eigenvalue of 2.00 and accounted for 50 percent of the variance in the individual items. All four questions had loadings greater than .65 on the first factor. Therefore, we calculated a composite score by taking the unweighted mean of these four questions ($\alpha = 0.66$).

Trait ratings and in-group heterogeneity. Participants had to rate both groups on six traits: competent, valuable, creative, intelligent, motivated, and honest. In research on interpersonal impression formation (see Rosenberg, Nelson, and Vivekanathan 1968), the two main criteria by which people are judged refer to their *ability* and their *morality* (see Blanz et al. 1995 for a similar distinction in group ratings). In the present study the group status manipulation allegedly referred to group creativity; therefore "creativity" referred to the central ability dimension, while the group's morality could be rated in terms of its "honesty." Consequently we differentiate between three dimensions: a status-defining dimension (creative), a status-related dimension (competent, valuable, intelligent, and motivated; in-group $\alpha = .74$, out-group $\alpha = .78$), and an alternative dimension (honest). Participants had to rate the extent to which they found each of these traits applicable to the members of the group concerned. As a measure of perceived in-group heterogeneity, participants were asked to indicate for each of these traits to the extent to which they thought the members of their group were alike (for the status-related

dimension: $\alpha = .80$). To facilitate the interpretation of this measure, we reverse-coded it, so that higher ratings indicate greater perceived in-group heterogeneity. All ratings were made on 7-point Likert scales (1 = not at all; 7 = very much).

Outcome allocation. Participants were asked how they would divide exactly 100 points, which were said to represent Dutch guilders, between one arbitrarily chosen member of their own group (not themselves) and one arbitrarily chosen member of the other group (see Ellemers et al. 1992). In line with the standard procedure in the "minimal group paradigm," this allocation task was not related to specific group features, nor were participants given the impression that they themselves might benefit from the allocations they made (see Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, and Flament 1971).

Identification. Identification with participants' own group was measured on 10 questions that we used in previous research (see Ellemers et al. 1988). These included perceived similarity of self to the in-group (e.g., "I am similar to the average member of my group"), feelings of involvement (e.g., "I feel involved with my group"), and satisfaction with one's group membership (e.g., "I am pleased to belong to this group"). These questions were answered on 7-point Likert scales (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree). From the 10 identification questions one composite score was calculated ($\alpha = .89$). We used this composite score for identification was used in all analyses.

Demographic variables. Participants were asked to state their sex and age, as well as their field and year of study.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

The number of in-group members was stated correctly by all participants; the number of people constituting the other group, as well as the relative size of the in-group (minority or majority), was indicated correctly by 96 percent of the participants. Furthermore, 99 percent of the participants correctly indicated their groups' creativity score; and all participants reported the two groups relative positions consistent with the status manipulation. Before the dependent measures were taken, we repeated the manip-

ulation for any participant who could not reproduce the intended information. Therefore we retained all participants for the statistical analyses.

In-Group Identification

A 2 (group status) by 2 (group size) analysis of variance on the mean identification score revealed significant main effects only of group status ($F(1,72) = 13.36, p < .001$) and group size ($F(1,72) = 14.61, p < .001$). Members of a high-status group identify more strongly with their group ($M = 4.45$) than members of a group with low status ($M = 3.54$). This finding corroborates our hypothesis (Hypothesis 4a) that people are more likely to identify with high- than with low-status groups. At the same time, minority-group members show more in-group identification ($M = 4.43$) than members of a majority group ($M = 3.56$). This supports the prediction that people tend to identify more strongly with a minority than with a majority group (Hypothesis 4b).

Optimal Distinctiveness

A 2 (group status) by 2 (group size) analysis of variance on the composite score for optimal distinctiveness revealed a significant main effect only of group size ($F(1,74) = 5.76, p < .05$). Membership in a minority group contributed more to a feeling of optimal distinctiveness ($M = 4.50$) than did majority-group membership ($M = 3.92$), in line with Brewer's (1991) argument. Furthermore, we found a substantial correlation between optimal distinctiveness and in-group identification ($r = .64, p < .001$), indicating that people identify more strongly with the in-group, the more the group provides for optimal distinctiveness.

Outcome Allocation

The allocations of points to the in-group and the out-group were subjected to a 2 (group status) by 2 (group size) analysis of variance, with target group as a within-subjects factor. This analysis revealed a main effect of target group ($F(1,74) = 6.94, p < .01$), which was qualified by an interaction of target group with group status ($F(1,74) = 9.50, p < .005$); no main or interactive effects of group size emerged in this analysis.

The relevant means and the analysis of simple main effects show that members of the high-status group allocated more points to the in-group ($M = 54.70$) than to the out-group ($M = 45.30; F(1,74) = 16.76, p < .001$). In the low-status group, however, points were divided equally between the in-group ($M = 49.63$) and the out-group ($M = 50.37, F(1,74) < 1, n.s.$). Thus, in line with Hypothesis 1, relative group status rather than group size affected people's outcome allocations.

Group Ratings

To facilitate interpretation of the group ratings, we first calculated difference scores by subtracting the out-group ratings from the in-group ratings on each of the three types of comparative dimensions. Thus the resulting difference scores indicate the extent to which group members show in-group favoritism in their evaluative ratings. The difference scores on the status-defining dimension, the status-related dimension, and the alternative dimension were subjected to a 2 (group status) by 2 (group size) between subjects MANOVA. (Analysis of the original ratings, with target group as a within-subjects factor, yielded virtually identical results.) Corroborating Hypothesis 1, this analysis revealed only a multivariate main effect of group status ($F(3,72) = 34.15, p < .001$), which was significant at the univariate level for all three comparative dimensions (see Table 1).

In agreement with our expectations, the high status group asserts its superior position with respect to the status-defining dimension, and the low-status group acknowledges this by allocating higher ratings to the out-group than to the in-group (see Hypothesis 2a). On the status-related dimension, however, mem-

Table 1. Effects of Group Status on Intergroup Differentiation (In-Group/Out-Group Ratings) on Three Comparative Dimensions. Asterisks are used to indicate which differentiation scores deviate significantly from zero

| | Comparative Dimension | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Status-Defining | Status-Related | Alternative |
| High Status | 2.18** | .49* | -.03 |
| Low Status | -1.58** | -.13 | .29* |
| (1, 74) | 97.99 | 12.15 | 4.67 |
| $p <$ | .001 | .001 | .035 |

(* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$).

bers of the low-status group do not differentiate between the two groups, although high-status group members rate the in-group more favorably than the out-group. Finally, on the alternative dimension, members of the high-status group do not differentiate, whereas the low-status group considers the in-group superior (see Hypothesis 2b). This general pattern of intergroup differentiation on the three types of dimensions corroborates our predictions in Hypothesis 2: The lower-status group members are more likely to negate the status difference, or even to claim in-group superiority, as the comparative dimension is associated less closely with group status.

Intragroup Heterogeneity

The in-group's perceived heterogeneity on the status-defining dimension, the status-related dimensions, and the alternative dimension were subjected to a 2 (group status) by 2 (group size) MANOVA.² This analysis revealed multivariate significant main effects of both factors (group status: $F(3,72) = 5.23$, $p < .005$; group size: $F(3,72) = 2.73$, $p < .05$).

At the univariate level, the main effect of group size was significant for the status-defining dimension ($F(1,74) = 4.54$, $p < .05$), and for the alternative dimension ($F(1,74) = 6.60$, $p < .015$). On both dimensions, the majority in-group is considered more heterogeneous (status-defining dimension: $M = 3.08$, alternative dimension: $M = 2.36$) than the minority in-group (status-defining dimension: $M = 2.79$, alternative dimension: $M = 2.08$). On the status-related dimensions, we observed a similar, but nonsignificant ($F(1,74) = 3.35$, $p < .075$) tendency (majority, $M = 2.61$;

Minority, $M = 2.17$). Although we did not explicitly predict these effects, they are consistent with previous research outcomes (see Simon and Brown 1987) and consistent with our earlier observation that minority-group members generally show stronger in-group identification than members of majority groups.

The group status main effect was significant only for the status-defining dimension ($F(1,74) = 8.72$, $p < .005$). The relevant means indicate that members of the low-status group perceive the in-group to be more heterogeneous ($M = 3.24$) than do members of the high-status group ($M = 2.22$). On the alternative dimension, we found a nonsignificant tendency ($F(1,74) = 2.42$, $p < .125$) in the opposite direction: High-status-group members considered their group to be more heterogeneous ($M = 2.65$) than did low-status-group members ($M = 2.21$). In fact, when we compare the ways in which low-status-group members rate their group on different dimensions, we find that the low-status in-group is perceived as more heterogeneous on the status-defining dimension than on the alternative dimension ($F(1,74) = 18.02$, $p < .001$).

The effects of group status are consistent with our expectations. On the status-defining dimension, the low-status group acknowledges its inferior position, as we have seen with the group ratings. Accordingly, members of the low-status group accentuate the heterogeneity of their group on this dimension (see Doosje, Spears, and Koomen 1995). On the alternative dimension, on which the low-status group considers the in-group to be superior, low-status-group members seem to perceive the in-group as relatively homogeneous.

In Hypothesis 3 we predicted that intragroup heterogeneity would be accentuated mainly with unfavorable in-group comparisons when in-group identification was low. Therefore, because group size affects in-group identification as well as perceived intragroup heterogeneity, we further investigated whether the group status effects described above might be caused by majority- (i.e., low-identifying) rather than minority-group members, although the multivariate interaction of group size with group status was not significant ($F(3,72) < 1$, *n.s.*).

As shown in Table 2, analysis of simple main effects confirms this supposition (see

² For exploratory purposes and for completeness, we also asked participants to rate the out-group on heterogeneity, on all comparative dimensions. Preliminary analysis revealed that perceived out-group heterogeneity operates mainly as background ratings, against which variations in in-group's perceived heterogeneity become apparent. This finding is consistent with our theoretical argument, which is not concerned primarily with the perceived heterogeneity of the in-group *relative to* the out-group, but focuses on strategic adaptations of in-group heterogeneity ratings to different comparative contexts. Thus, because the out-group's heterogeneity ratings seemed unessential to this investigation from both an empirical and a theoretical viewpoint we decided not to include them in the main analyses; they would have added undue complexity to the description of the results.

Table 2. Effects of Group Status and Group Size on Perceived In-Group Heterogeneity on Three Comparative Dimensions

| | Majority | Minority | Total |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------|
| <i>Status-Defining Dimension</i> | | | |
| High status | 2.35 ^a | 2.10 ^a | 2.22 |
| Low status | 3.84 ^b | 2.63 ^a | 3.24 |
| Total | 3.08 | 2.36 | |
| <i>Status-Related Dimension</i> | | | |
| High status | 2.39 ^{a b} | 2.17 ^a | 2.28 |
| Low status | 2.84 ^b | 2.17 ^a | 2.51 |
| Total | 2.61 | 2.17 | |
| <i>Alternative Dimension</i> | | | |
| High status | 2.85 ^a | 2.45 ^a | 2.65 |
| Low status | 2.74 ^a | 1.68 ^b | 2.21 |
| Total | 2.79 | 2.08 | |

Means with the same superscript do not differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$).

Hypothesis 3). With low group status, majority-group members perceive greater intragroup heterogeneity than minority-group members on the status-defining ($F(1,74) = 6.08, p < .025$), the status-related ($F(1,74) = 3.76, p < .056$), and the alternative dimension ($F(1,74) = 6.76, p < .015$). To put it differently, minority-group members' perceptions of intragroup heterogeneity do not depend on group status for the status-defining ($F(1,74) = 1.29, n.s.$) or status-related dimensions ($F(1,74) < 1, n.s.$); they tend to perceive even less intragroup heterogeneity with low group status on the alternative dimension ($F(1,74) = 3.49, p < .07$; two-tailed). Thus, in keeping with Hypothesis 3, it seems that the accentuation of intragroup heterogeneity in response to low group status is used mainly in majority groups (where overall identification is relatively low), whereas minority-group members (who identify more strongly with their group) appear to refrain from using this individual-level strategy.

We also investigated more explicitly whether the effect of relative group size on perceived intragroup heterogeneity might be mediated by the resulting level of in-group identification. When we included in-group identification as a covariate in a 2 (group status) by 2 (group size) MANOVA, it contributed significantly to the perception of intragroup heterogeneity ($F(3,68) = 4.42, p < .01$). As we would expect, the effect of group size was no longer significant ($F(3,68) = 1.73, n.s.$) on any of the three comparative dimensions. The group status main effect

remained significant ($F(3,68) = 3.65, p < .025$). After inclusion of in-group identification as a covariate, however, the size of the effect on the status-defining dimension was diminished somewhat ($F(1,70) = 2.96, p < .09$), while the group status main effect on the alternative dimension was enhanced ($F(1,70) = 3.98, p < .05$).

In-Group Identification and Strategic Ratings

To further assess the occurrence of in-group favoritism among group members with different in-group identifications (see Hypothesis 3), we divided participants into high and low identifiers on the basis of a median split (which fell at 4, the scale midpoint). We first determined that high and low identifiers were represented sufficiently in the high and low group status conditions ($\chi^2 = 3.78, n.s., N = 75$).

For the outcome distributions, we calculated the difference between points allocated to the in-group and points allocated to the out-group. We included in-group identification (low/high) as an independent variable in the analysis of variance, in order to investigate the extent to which evidence of in-group favoritism would emerge among group members who displayed different levels of in-group identification. In agreement with our characterization of in-group favoritism as a group-level strategy (see Hypothesis 3a), discriminative point allocations favoring the in-group emerge only when in-group identification was high ($M = 7.67$, deviation from zero: $F(1,67) = 11.62, p < .001$), but not when in-group identification is low ($M = 0.67, F(1,67) < 1, n.s.$).

In a similar vein, we tested whether group status effects could be obtained for each level of in-group identification with respect to intergroup differentiation on the three comparative dimensions. We obtained the reproduction of the status difference on the status-defining dimension among low ($F(1,67) = 30.88, p < .001$) as well as high ($F(1,67) = 71.08, p < .001$) identifiers. However, the tendency of high-status-group members to display greater in-group favoritism than low-status-group members on the status-related dimension could be traced only to the high identifiers ($F(1,67) = 9.20, p < .005$); it remained nonsignificant among low-identifying group members ($F(1,67) =$

2.98, *n.s.*). Likewise, the perceived superiority of the low-status in-group on the alternative dimension was maintained by high identifiers ($F(1,67) = 10.70, p < .005$), but not by low identifiers ($F(1,67) < 1, n.s.$). These findings add support for our contention (see Hypothesis 3a) that displays of in-group favoritism, constituting a group-level strategy, occur only among people who are prepared to identify as group members.

We also checked the extent to which the effects of group status on perceived intra-group heterogeneity could be attributed to group members with a differential sense of in-group identification. As predicted in Hypothesis 3b, the tendency of low-status-group members to accentuate the in-group's heterogeneity on the status-defining dimension (on which the in-group was inferior) was displayed only by group members who showed low in-group identification ($F(1,67) = 6.53, p < .015$), while among high identifiers, group status did not affect perceived intra-group heterogeneity ($F(1,67) = 2.66, n.s.$). Conversely, the inclination of low-status-group members to emphasize the in-group's homogeneity on the alternative dimension (on which they considered the in-group superior) could be traced only to high identifiers ($F(1,67) = 6.43, p < .015$); it did not occur among low identifiers ($F(1,67) < 1, n.s.$).

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the results of this study offer convincing support for our hypotheses. As predicted (Hypothesis 1), the use of strategic outcome allocations or group ratings seems to depend mainly on the relative status rather than relative size of the in-group. This finding corroborates our argument that membership in a low-status group, which constitutes an identity threat, elicits strategic responses aimed at deriving positive identity. We also found, however, that relative group size determines whether people prefer an individual- or a group-level strategy to cope with identity threat. Indeed, in line with Brewer's (1991) contention, minority-group membership seems to contribute more to a feeling of distinctiveness than majority-group membership; this point may account for relatively strong in-group identification in the minority-group condition (see Hypothesis 4b) and for concomitant displays of group-level strategies in response to low group status.

Thus, although minority-group membership is not a sufficient cause for in-group favoritism, it predisposes people to display in-group favoring biases (rather than using more individual-level strategies) to cope with low group status.

In the strategic responses displayed by low-status-group members, an interesting pattern emerges. As expected, group ratings on the status-defining dimension merely reflect the status manipulation. In line with Hypothesis 2, however, high-status-group members favor the in-group in status-related outcome allocations and group ratings, but low-status-group members seem less prepared to acknowledge their group's inferior position when measures are less clearly related to the induced difference in group creativity. Indeed, when the groups are compared on an alternative dimension that allows more interpretational freedom, members of the low-status group claim in-group superiority, whereas high-status-group members do not differentiate between the two groups. Given that previous research often relied on a single measure to tap biased evaluations or outcome allocations, inconsistencies in previous findings might be attributed to differences in the perceived relevance of the central measure to the current statuses of the groups involved. The present investigation allows us to specify that group members will acknowledge inter-group differences on status-related measures, but are likely to challenge the existing status relations when measures are less clearly associated with group status.

We also assessed perceived intragroup heterogeneity as an identity management strategy. As expected, low-status-group members accentuated their group's heterogeneity on the status-defining dimension but considered the in-group to be relatively homogeneous with respect to the alternative dimension. Thus group members *selectively* accentuate the in-group's heterogeneity or homogeneity, depending respectively on whether the group is perceived as inferior (i.e., on the status-defining dimension) or superior (i.e., on the alternative dimension). Insofar as these ratings convey (on the one hand) that their group's inferiority does not necessarily apply to all group members, while (on the other hand) all group members are considered equally superior, they may be taken as an indication of strategic perceptions of intragroup variability.

These results take us one step further than previous investigations of intragroup variability ratings. It has been demonstrated that people may emphasize the heterogeneity of their group when confronted with negative information concerning the in-group (Doosje, Spears, and Koomen 1995; Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears 1995; Lee and Ottati 1995; Simon et al. 1995). In previous work, however, overall impressions of in-group heterogeneity were compared between subjects, to demonstrate that under certain circumstances people can be induced to focus either on the in-group's relative heterogeneity or on its homogeneity. The present study, however, shows that even when specific comparisons are made, the same participants *simultaneously* accentuate the in-group's heterogeneity in some respects and the group's homogeneity in other respects (see Simon 1992). In this way we offer additional support for the contention that intragroup variability ratings can be strategically adapted to changing circumstances, and thus are subject to motivational considerations rather than emerging from cognitive accentuation principles (see Simon and Hamilton 1994).

We aimed to determine whether individual- or group-level strategies would be preferred under different circumstances. In line with Hypothesis 3a, only high identifiers displayed in-group-favoring outcome allocations or favored the in-group (when evaluative dimensions offered some interpretational ambiguity). Furthermore, we demonstrated that only low identifiers accentuate the in-group's heterogeneity when the group as a whole is considered inferior (see Hypothesis 3b). Conversely, only high identifiers emphasize intragroup homogeneity while claiming in-group superiority.

Finally, we observed that majority-group members are more likely to display an individual-level strategy (i.e., accentuate the in-group's heterogeneity on the dimensions on which they must acknowledge their group's inferiority), while members of a minority group are more inclined to show a group-level response (i.e., by emphasizing intragroup homogeneity on the dimension on which they claim in-group superiority). The selective accentuation of intragroup homogeneity or heterogeneity could be explained fully by different levels of in-group identification among minority- and majority- group members, an indication that the effects of

relative group size are mediated by the resulting amount of in-group identification. In this way, the present study adds support for our previous conclusion that relative group size mainly determines the *nature* (i.e., individual- or group-level) of strategic responses to differences in group status.

Some isolated findings similar to those reported here were documented previously, but the focus on particular issues in separate studies yielded an incomplete and inconsistent pattern in the literature. In the present study we take a more integrative approach; we aim to gain a broader theoretical perspective on the issues at hand. Indeed, this study builds on and extends existing insights in terms of the combined investigation of different phenomena in intergroup perceptions. First, we demonstrated that group members may use various *strategies* to cope with identity threat; we found that inferior group status elicits strategic responses, while group size mainly determines the nature of these responses.³ Second, the results of this study show that the choice of strategy is determined by the availability of *situational ambiguities*, on the one hand, and *identity considerations*, on the other. Claims of in-group superiority among low-status-group members emerged only on comparative dimensions that allow for some interpretational ambiguity, but the allocation of points (often used as the main dependent variable in empirical investigations) did not reveal in-group favoritism among low-status-group members. Nevertheless, ratings favoring the in-group were displayed only by highly identified group members. Finally, we found support for our contention that perceived *intragroup variability* may be used as a identity management strategy. The accentuation of intragroup heterogeneity, an indication that people psychologically distance themselves from the rest of the in-group, was displayed only by low-identifying group members. Those people who were more strongly committed to their group maintained a homogeneous group image.

³ Our experimental design, in which status and group size were manipulated orthogonally, allows us to disentangle the two, and for analytical purposes we consider it important to specify these effects. When relative group status is not made explicit, however (as is often the case in real life, which is reflected in previous investigations, see Simon et al. 1995), group size may be taken as an implicit status cue, and as such can elicit strategic intergroup behavior.

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